25: Brodrick--98 S-3 (1939) 1948 Laotians-1-2
116, 626, 683, 754

"There are not only the spirits, ghosts and demons themselves, but there are also their servants in human shape, there are sorceresses and there are witches, and these last can, and do, change themselves into tapeworms, gnawing at your guts until you die, so the moment that you must know that you have a witch-tapeworm inside you, you must send for the wise man, who will pinch and prick you until the bewitched tapeworm crawls out in fear. There are also what are known as hereditary or innocent witches, poor women who have not acquired but have only inherited their dread arts; such innocents can be cured, it seems, and are more to be pitied than reviled.

But there was no quarter shown to wizards. If a man was marked as a wizard he must emigrate or be slain. And we may take it that in a rather 'primitive' and static and isolated community, a 'wizard' was often no more than a queer fellow who thought for himself and did not like the way of life of the majority, had different tastes in meat and drink, did not care for sports, dances and festivals, possibly was sexually aberrant, in fact the sort of scoundrel who must be suppressed if society is to be kept decent and reasonably conservative. In some communities such deviant members are more lucky and are straightway hailed as shamans or medicine-men. But the Laotians just did not like wizards at all. Before the French got to interfering with good old customs, there was an ordeal for wizards and their accusers. Two pots of boiling coconut oil were set up. Into one pot went the sorcerer and into the other his denouncer. Whoever got out of his pot first was cracked over the head and disposed of.

So, underneath all the easy-going, good nature of the Laotians lie, when the conventions are outraged, some definite reactions of a rather violent kind. One wonders what has happened to these reactions now that they cannot be released in a right and proper and traditional way. For, if we can say that the Laotians have little or no religion, in the sense of a way of life or a moral discipline, they are filled and informed with beliefs."

"But in regard to the kingdom's laws, it is a certain fact that 671
there are very few of them, because, in my opinion, there is no 571
great need of any in order to live in accordance with the customs 626
of the land. The people are brought up to work, to have very little
to do with foreigners, not to undertake anything which might dis-
turb them and to live an idle and /115/ listless life although not
lacking any of the things necessary to preserve it. The king's will,
which does not greatly interfere with his people, takes the place
of a great many laws for them.... The manner in which the in-
habitants of the land live with one another is highly civil and
obliging. Unfriendliness and quarrels are banished... they all have
enough to live on and get along on, so that one does not hear of
thieves except as a thing quite out of the ordinary.... But the /565/
mandarins do not behave in the same way. Indeed, their insolence
and their insulting and criminal conduct dim the praise which the
common people merit on this account, because they abuse the
power which they have in the kingdom, and when they see some-
thing which pleases them... they act in such wise as to find means
for taking possession of it.

"But if we should now pass to the person of the king in order to 643*
describe him, there is no monarch, no matter how powerful, whom 174
he does not regard as beneath him, and it would indeed seem that 648
he affects not to yield in any particular to the emperors of China...
Only rarely does he appear in public... preferring to be worshiped
by his people as a hidden God rather than as a man like themselves
and of the same nature... He allows himself to be seen only twice
/116/ a year, for a period of three days, by his people, who re-
ceive this grace from their prince with such gratitude and joyous
sentiments that he forgets nothing on these occasions which might
contribute to their amusement. For this purpose there are several /527/
elephants which are trained to do a thousand little tricks and several wild
animals which are kept chained and made to fight... finally there
are wrestlers and gladiators and others, with their skirmishes which
last until last until evening and terminate all this rejoicing...

"Of all the prerogatives which he (the king) has, and which are 643*
a further mark of the extent of his power, that of having several 576
petty tributary kings in his dependency who come to his court to do
him homage and acknowledge him as their sovereign and who give
him superb presents, is by no means the least. He receives these
ambassadors in a great parlor seated on an extremely high throne
and garbed in his ceremonial robes, and replies to their civilities